WHAT IS RELIGION?

THE QUESTION ANSWERED

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WHAT IS RELIGION?

THE QUESTION ANSWERED.

BY

HENRY COLMAN.

"People will not believe that it is possible to be religious without *a* religion."

ANON.

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NOTICE.

The subjoined contains the substance of a Discourse delivered on Sunday, Sept. 27th, 1846, at the New Gravel-Pit Chapel, Hackney, near London. This will explain its style, and any local allusions which may appear in it. Its whole object is to console the diffident and distrustful, and to aid, in a very humble way, the cause of Universal Forbearance and Charity. It was not designed for publication. It is published by request; and I am most happy to leave behind me any recognitions of that unceasing kindness and good-will, and that distinguished friendship, which I have enjoyed during my protracted residence in this country.

If the happiness of Heaven is, as many perhaps with some reason suppose, to consist in part in a more elevated and nearer intercourse with the wise and good, with minds stimulated by an ardent love of truth and glowing with an irrepressible passion for moral goodness, and in

the strengthening and continual enlargement and purification of kind and benevolent affections and sympathies,—I can only say, the delightful intimacy which I have had with many such minds during a long life, and have enjoyed so fully here, even in a land of comparative strangers, gives a value to my faith and hopes, which overwhelms and defies all utterance.

London, October 1, 1846.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

I PROPOSE to consider on this occasion one of the most important questions which can be addressed to reflecting minds; and that is, What is Religion? I shall, in a plain, direct and familiar manner, give the best answer to it which I am able. Most persons will say at once, The answer is very easy; and yet a comprehensive, universal, practical, unexceptionable answer, and therefore a true answer, may not be so easy as we suppose. If we should go into the thousand churches or chapels in London, how many of

them should we find agreeing to give the same answer? You have lately had an example of the unity which prevails in this matter among persons calling themselves Christians, and coming together from distant parts of the world, that they might unite in a common bond of what is called Evangelical Alliance. They begin with excluding from the pale of Christianity the Unitarians—that was a small affair; and then the Roman Catholics—that was a large affair, for the members of this Church embrace perhaps a third of the Christian world; and who can have a doubt, that if there had been any effervescence on matters of theological doctrine among these heterogeneous elements, which seemed so calm and placid, it would have been as active as it has always been found among such fervid bodies, when brought together? Quiet as the upper surface appeared, if some one of

the clerical chemists had ventured to pour in even a few drops of those theological acids in which they often deal so largely, we should have seen a great many separations and the formation of new affinities, and not a few of those explosions which often result in such a process from the disruption of old and the formation of new combinations. Harmonious as all this meeting assumed to be, there was not a Baptist, holding to the principles of his sect, who would have admitted any other than a person baptized in his form to his fellowship; nor a Scotch Presbyterian, who would have received to his communion any one without a token of the soundness of his faith; nor an Episcopalian, who would have permitted any one of the Dissenting brethren, whom he so affectionately embraced, to occupy his pulpit or minister at his altar.

This is an example of the harmony which

prevails in the community on the subject of Religion. It would not be surprising, if, in the assembly which I am now addressing, each of us were called upon to answer by himself and for himself this great question, What is Religion? there should be found a diversity, if not a strong contrariety, of opinion and sentiment.

Does this arise from the nature of the subject? Is the question not susceptible of a simple and direct answer? Is religion in itself a matter so indefinite, so changeable, or a matter so incomprehensible, that we cannot determine what it is? I think not; and in spite of all the diversities of sentiment which exist, and the various forms under which this subject presents itself, I hope it will not be deemed presumptuous, if, with all due respect for the judgment of others, I venture to give my own opinion.

I. Religion is not faith, or rather faith is not religion, nor is profession, nor form of worship, nor sect, nor party, nor opinion. Not one of these is religion, though it may share in all of them, and may be assisted by all of them. A man may have any faith, make any profession, be of any party, hold to any opinions, worship at any church, and be a religious man; or he may be, in the common acceptation of the term, of no faith, make no professions, unite with no party, hold no set opinions, worship at no church, and be a religious man; he may be a Christian, a Jew, a Mahometan, a Pagan, a worshipper of fire or of wood and stone; he may be, in the common acceptation of the term, an infidel or unbeliever, or a simple Deist, and be as religious in the one case as in the other. One matter only excludes him from the possibility of being a religious man; and that is, being

an Atheist. Religion pre-supposes a God: if there is no God, there can be no religion; the man, therefore, who does not believe there is a God, cannot have any religion.

I beg not to be misunderstood in this case. I do not say that faith, worship, profession or party, are all matters of indifference; far otherwise; but that, of themselves, they do not constitute religion; and amidst all the infinite diversities of these which exist among men, which have always existed and are always likely to exist, you may find co-existing that which, I believe, to be religion in all its truth and power. Religion is a principle of duty, and it is that principle carried into action.

1. I have said that faith is not religion. By faith, I mean belief or creed or opinion. Men may make what confessions of faith they please; and frequently repeating these con-

fessions in a grave manner, they may come at last to persuade themselves that they believe them. This often happens, when in truth the subject-matter of their creed has had no serious reflection or inquiry whatever. But when I speak of faith in this case, I refer simply and solely to an intelligent conviction, founded upon the understanding, of the truth of that which we profess to believe. Every intelligent mind knows that what a man will believe in such case is not in his power. He cannot do as he will. He cannot believe without he first perfectly comprehends the terms in which the subject-matter proposed to his faith is presented; he cannot believe unless he has reason for believing; he cannot believe by proxy; he cannot believe against evidence. He may be seriously responsible for not taking pains to inquire into the truth. In certain states of mind, which may be the

result of neglect, or otherwise induced by his own fault, he may not be able to see evidence clearly, or to weigh it with impartiality. Many associations, which he might control, may affect his judgment favourably or unfavourably in regard to any subject; prejudices, of which he ought to be ashamed, may exert a hurtful influence; ungoverned passions or habitual vice may prevail against the clear decisions of his understanding. All these circumstances render a man highly responsible for the conclusions to which he comes, because the government and discipline of the mind are as much a matter of duty as the regulation of our outward actions; but setting aside such cases, a man, solely bent on discovering the truth, and using the best means and helps of which he can avail himself, and honestly professing and living by the conclusions to which he has thus arrived,

can be no farther responsible, because he is no farther free to choose. He may be sure of indulgence with that Infinite Intellect who alone is capable of estimating and understanding all the circumstances under which we are placed, and all the various influences which operate upon the mind, and which serve to involve some minds unwittingly and unconsciously in the mists and thick darkness of error.

We are not to infer from this that truth itself is wholly unsettled, and that there is no way of arriving at it. What is true, does not in any degree depend upon our opinions or belief. A man may persuade himself that the tide will cease to ebb and flow, or that the sun will not set to-night nor rise to-morrow; but his opinions or belief, however sincerely or confidently he may hold them, will not affect the matters to which they refer,—will neither hinder their recurrence

nor control the results which are to flow from them. A diversity of opinion or faith may grow out of our ignorance or our knowledge, out of our natural temperaments and the extent or limitation of our original capacities; or it may be determined by the position for observation which we occupy, by our habits of thought and habits of action, by our education, by early associations, and by influences without number, which it would be vain to attempt to recount. A man looking through a common telescope or spy-glass finds every object, to which his instrument is directed, magnified and brought near; if he turn the glass end for end, he sees the same objects diminished and removed to a distance. The objects themselves remain unchanged, let him look through which end he will; they are not at all altered in their form, relations, size or distance.

I repeat it, that I am far from thinking

our religious belief a matter of indifference; nor are we to infer that the various conflicting sects in religion are all wrong in their religious opinions or faith; nor, if any one be in error, that all these are equally in error. Some may approximate the truth much more nearly than others. Some may be wholly right, although, in the present condition of human nature and human knowledge, this can scarcely be expected of any. The views of those who see least, are not very far behind those who see most; and the views of those who see farthest, can take in only a point in the infinite line of knowledge. What a small portion of the horizon can be compassed by any human eye! What but an Omniscient Mind is able to embrace the limitless circle of truth, and to measure the height and length, the breadth and depth, of universal knowledge! We should seek to help each

other along in the dim twilight, and rejoice that it is not total darkness. We should wait patiently until the day completely dawns upon us, and the transparent light of truth comes down in its fulness, splendour and glory.

Faith is matter of praise or blame in any case according to the circumstances under which it is formed. I have already said we cannot in this case do as we will. If the evidence, in any case of doctrine or fact, is in your view insufficient or contradictory or opposed to it, you cannot believe it, whatever you may profess to do. If the thing itself proposed to your belief is in your opinion impossible, you cannot believe it. If you know it to be impossible, that utterly prevents your belief, because in your mind it has not and cannot have any existence. If the thing itself proposed to your faith be

unintelligible or inexplicable, you cannot believe it, because there is in fact nothing to believe. All pretensions to faith in such cases are idle and mere delusions.

Faith may be matter of merit or demerit, it may be praiseworthy or blameable, just in proportion to the pains we take to make it enlightened and true. Faith concerns itself with certain truths and facts. These facts or truths rest upon certain evidence. The merit of faith consists in the degree of attention and inquiry which we give to understand these facts, and the evidence by which they are supported. If our faith is merely a blind and ignorant prejudice,—if it is taken up and held without inquiry,—if it is wholly the creature of education, or comes to us by mere inheritance, like the cast-off clothes of those who have gone before us,—it can have no merit whatever. If it is, on the other hand,

the result of our own serious inquiries at those sources of knowledge where it is likely to be obtained,—if it is likewise the result of a fairness and docility of mind, which we have taken pains to cultivate and maintain,—then, let our faith result as it may, it has all the merit of a virtue, all the merit which careful, candid and intelligent inquiry and the virtuous discipline of the mind and heart can claim.

Nothing can be more absurd than to insist upon bringing all men to the same standard of belief. It cannot be done. As their minds and tempers are different, their habits of observation and the position from which they look at things are essentially different; so, also, is the evidence by which certain facts or certain truths are supported different. It may be the evidence of personal observation, or of mere reason and argument. It

may be supported by our own personal experience; it may be the testimony of one or more individuals; or it may rest upon the concurrent testimony of many. It may be wholly probable and presumptive, and this probability or presumption may vary in degree from the lowest to the highest point; or it may be absolute demonstration, and therefore irresistible and overwhelming. Take the creeds and formularies of faith in some of our churches, and as they have been the work of many years and the result of the concentrated energies of many minds to frame and compact them, so it requires much study and a large comprehension of mind intelligently to embrace and understand them. Take even the most simple of the great truths of religion or even of practical philosophy, and it will often require a good deal of sagacity and no little investigation to understand

them in all their relations and bearings. Now to insist upon every man's receiving the same creed, if, in so doing, we demand an intelligent understanding of what he professes to believe, is requiring an impossibility. We may often, by various means, compel a profession of faith: we may obtain it from the simple and ignorant through their simplicity; from the timid and alarmed we may extort it through their fears; from the shrewd and hypocritical we may get it through their cunning; but this is not faith, and in no sense entitled to that high character.

Our whole duty in this matter consists in keeping our minds open to the reception of whatever truth may be presented to them; in removing or preventing all prejudice which might disorder our vision; in applying ourselves, with all the powers which God enables us to exert, to every source of knowledge

within our reach, that we may learn what is good and true; and having done this in the exercise of an honest conscience, we need have no fears of the result.

2. I have said, in the second place, that religion is not any form of worship. The first purpose of all worship is to express our reverential sentiments for the Object of worship; the second, and this comes out only in an advanced and improved condition of the mind, through the influence of such acts and services, to affect the moral character and conduct in our dispositions and actions. Now with respect to the former, it is not the expression of the sentiments of piety, but the possession of them, which is all-important. The outward expression of sentiments of duty or subjection in respect to an earthly sovereign or superior, may be a necessary proof of their existence; but it cannot be necessary in regard to the Being "to whom all hearts are open."

With respect to the second object of devotional services, that is, their moral effects upon the worshippers themselves, it is obvious that these effects will be determined very much by the character or circumstances of those who engage in them. It may be deemed necessary that there should be some outward forms of worship in order to keep alive in the heart the sentiments of which they are the expression. It is believed by many that without these forms such sentiments would be likely to become extinct. The internal is so much under the influence of the external, and our feelings and sentiments take so deep an impression from what is addressed wholly to our senses, that this is probable; and a constant training of the mind under the influence of external acts may, perhaps, to the majority of persons, be indispensable in order to form a habit of devotion. I cannot, however, believe that it is universally necessary.

I am persuaded that there are many minds of a highly reflective and philosophic character, most profound and habitual in their devotion, who never utter an audible prayer or perform an external rite. We cannot doubt that many of our friends the Quakers are a devout people, and yet here is a general absence of external forms. On the other hand, it certainly cannot be said that men are made devout in proportion to the frequency and length of their acts of devotion. Persons, the seriousness and sincerity of whose devotion cannot be doubted, may sometimes be seen asleep, or giving an attention purely mechanical, during some of the most striking and beautiful portions of the Cathedral service; and I have the honest testimony of a young person, a really devout person, confined to a religious house, that nothing could be more exhausting and disagreeable to her

than the incessant recurrence of devotional services. In general, I think it will be found that the minds of those persons who are constantly multiplying and attending upon the external forms of devotion, become obdurate, like a hard-trodden pavement. They have a great deal of mechanical formality, but no lively and generous affections. One constantly hears from really serious members of the Established Church that the length of the service renders it excessively tedious; and the frequent repetitions of certain portions become almost painful.

But persons are very differently disposed in respect to forms; and forms which are well adapted to certain minds are quite otherwise in respect to others. Education, custom, fashion, degree of improvement, convenience and habit, all have their influence in rendering some forms of worship more suitable to

particular communities or particular individuals than others. In my view, there is no doubt that different minds are by nature differently constituted, according as one or another faculty predominates in their organization. In devotional forms, some will be found to like the prose, and others the poetry of worship; some the plain, and others the picturesque, according to their original mental endowments. Men with a large causality demand a reason for every thing. Men with little ratiocination and large marvellousness do not want a reason for any thing; the more mystery and obscurity, the more the thing commends itself to their reception. They belong to the class who believe a doctrine the more strongly because it is impossible.

John Knox assembled his stern congregations on the side of the bleak hills of Fifeshire, and there made a granite rock his pulpit, and

to his imperturbable hearers, seated upon the stones, stretched out in their iron armour upon the cold ground, or sheltering themselves with little concern, only so that they might hear the word of God, under their coarse plaids from the icy wind or the drifting snow, poured out his thundering and vindictive eloquence; and then these saints "lifted up" a belligerent psalm, with an energy that seemed to expand every muscle almost to bursting, and a nasal twang which rung through the hills, like the shepherd's horn that overthrew the walls of Jericho, and in a style of versification which defies all comment. Who can doubt that this form of service was most congenial to the tone of mind of the oaken men of that time and place? But how different this from the Cathedral of transcendently beautiful architectural proportions, with its carved screens and panels wrought with

superlative art, and with its carpeted aisles, and altars covered with crimson velvet and shining gold, and with its mitres and silk vestments and lawn vestments, and cushioned seats and stuffed hassocks, lest the knees of the devotees should suffer, and with its vergers' bands and beadles' staves, and white gowns and black gowns, and chanting priests and singing boys, and with the gentle and tender notes and anon the swelling thunders of the organ peeling through this noble edifice, and echoed and re-echoed from its lofty arches! Yet, shall we not suppose that such forms are suited to another class of the devout?

Men have adored the Divinity in the mountains and rivers, in the forests and in the sea, in the vegetable creation, in all the forms of animal life, in the clouds and winds, in the calm and in the tempest, in the sparkling and inextinguishable stars, in the radiant and

placid moon gliding gently across the firmament, in the rising sun waking the creation into new existence, in his genial meridian beams forcing the tide of vegetable life to its flood, in his descent at evening, proudly wrapping the gorgeous robes of a celestial glory around him, and pouring over the wide earth a flood of golden splendour. Who can doubt that the offerings which are then presented by these worshippers of the material world, are an acceptable homage paid to the wisdom, the power, the beneficence, which these magnificent and beautiful phenomena embody and represent, and to a more subtle, abstract and intellectual conception of which their untutored minds have not yet ascended? I will take even the grossest form of the most degraded idolatry, and, in the trembling homage paid by the very humblest worshipper to the senseless and misshapen lump of wood or stone

which he has erected into his God, we cannot —much as we may mourn over so pitiable a degradation of the human intellect—we cannot doubt the sincerity of the worship, and even the acceptableness of the offering to the Being "with whom a man is accepted, not according to that he hath, but according to that he purposeth in his heart."

To every man, that form of devotion is best which is in his own view most expressive, which to his own feelings is most agreeable, which most deeply impresses his own heart, and tends most strongly to form his own mind to a habit of devotion, and to give a constant and controlling influence to the great principles of religious duty. This of course assumes always that the act itself involves nothing impure, or false, or immoral, as clearly much worship has often done. Indeed, what would be fitting at some times and in some places

and for some persons, would be totally unsuited to other times and other persons and other places.

3. Nor must we forget, under any circumstances, that devotion itself is not religion. I beg your attention here to the distinction, certainly most just, between the intention which prompts an act and the act itself. If we believe that God has commanded us to worship him in some outward form, then a voluntary obedience to that command is an act of religion. If we believe that our external services give him pleasure, and from that motive we offer them, then our service is a religious act. But if without any such motive we perform devotional services,—if we think we are the more pious for the multitude or expensiveness of our devotional services,—if, to use without irreverence a familiar phrase which will best express my meaning, we

think for a moment that we can lay God under an obligation by our acts of homage,—we can fall into no grosser error. An earthly sovereign may be gratified with the splendour of external flattery which is rendered him, by the obeisance with which he is approached, and the pomp of retinue with which his vassals crowd around him. But I dare not compare man with God; I have hardly the courage to say how empty, how futile, how idle, how worthless are, in their proper sense, all these offerings to that Infinite Being, "of whom and through whom and to whom are all things."

Under all the diversified forms of external homage or worship which prevailed among the semi-civilized nations of olden times, offerings of lambs, and oxen, and young doves, and bread, and goblets of wine, and oil, and vestments of gold and silver, were

profusely enjoined, because the priests were fond of roast beef and roast lamb, and pigeons, and wine, and gorgeous apparel; but, unless our views of the Divinity are of the lowest character, unless we choose to think that God is only a great man, or, as too many have done and I am afraid even still do, think that the priest is God, or somehow or other a part of the Deity,—in which I am sorry to say that they are too much encouraged when the priest undertakes to absolve them from their sins, or shew them the face of God, or give them a part of their God in a sensible form to eat,—it is impossible for us to think that such services or such sacrifices, even though they were piled as high as an Egyptian pyramid, can have the slightest value in the sight of God, beyond the intention with which they are offered and which they express; or that the gorgeous worship of

a Cathedral ten times larger than St. Peter's, filled with chanting priests and smoking incense, and echoing and reverberating from every corner the full and solemn tones of the thundering organ, and the united acclamations of the crowds of worshippers, be it as sincere as it may be, can have any more welcome before God than the simple prayer of the meanest pauper child in her wretched hovel, as she lays her shivering head upon her pillow of straw, and recites the only poor doggrel hymn which she has been taught:

> "Now I lay me down to sleep,
> I pray the Lord my soul to keep;
> If I should die before I wake,
> I pray the Lord my soul to take."

No, let us not for a moment think so humbly of that Great Being who is from everlasting to everlasting, creating, sustaining, providing for, blessing a universe, in all its

infinitely varied forms of life and being, as to suppose that he requires our services on his own account, or that he is

> "——— Lord alone of man,
> When thousand worlds are round."

4. I proceed to say that religion does not consist in any ascetic observances, or any separation of ourselves from the world with a view to lead a more holy life. It is the appointment of Heaven that man should live in this world by honest labour; and he is bound by every religious obligation and every social obligation, which is only another name for a religious obligation, to use his physical powers, his intellectual powers, all the means of useful labour or of doing good which fall to his lot, whether in the form of wealth or learning or rank or fame or office, and, as far as can honestly be done, to enlarge and

strengthen all these powers, in providing for his own wants and the wants of others,—in alleviating misery and evil,—in increasing the wealth of the community, that so that increase may be used in farther advancing its other best interests,—in spreading useful knowledge, and so elevating the general condition and enlarging the power of improvement among men. In a few words, he is bound to spend his life in making himself and others, to the very extent of his ability, better, wiser and happier. God has placed him in this world for this purpose; given him powers to this end; made him dependant in a thousand ways upon others, who often must perish without his exertions. These are the ends for which he is to live. To encourage him in all this, God has filled this world with good; has made virtue its own reward; a conformity to the laws of our phy-

sical constitution a necessary condition of health, and a conformity to the laws of our moral constitution equally a source of moral health and vigour. He has made success dependant ordinarily upon our own exertions; the increase of our talents contingent upon the proper use of them; the seeds of good, of enjoyment and happiness, productive according as we cultivate them. As he has filled the world with the means of good, so has he every where multiplied the sources of innocent pleasure and gratification. Man is bound to enjoy the beneficence of Heaven; and, if he has put it out of his own power to enjoy, or there are circumstances, which he cannot control, or, in the inscrutable dealings of Divine Providence, which prevent his enjoyment, he must take all possible pains that his suffering should not mar or hinder the enjoyment of others.

Man is in duty bound to make the world as happy as by his humble instrumentality it can be made; to require only that no man shall be happy at the expense of the sufferings of another; to look with complacency, if they be innocent, upon the humblest pleasures and pastimes of the most humble, if they are not capable of superior pleasures; and to do what he can, and all he can, to multiply and elevate and enlarge the sources of enjoyment and happiness to all. In the appetite which God has given to all men for pleasure, in the infinite sources of enjoyment which are opened to our senses, to our taste, to our imaginations, to our understandings and to our affections, our benevolent Creator bids us be happy and make others happy, and diffuse the flood of enjoyment as far as possible. There are wholesome rules of restraint; there are important safeguards against that excessive

self-indulgence, which might prove fatal; there are cautions and precepts and counsels in our nature and experience, in the history of others which is continually passing before us, in the examples of the wise and good, in the dictates of conscience, and in the lessons of our holy religion, to protect us from danger, if we will listen to them, and to enable us by moderation to preserve even to a green old age our faculties of enjoyment, and thus in truth vastly increase the sum of our own and others' happiness. This is the world in which God has placed man; this the stage of action on which he calls upon us to acquit ourselves like men; this is the garden of delight to which he has introduced us, that we may feast ourselves upon his goodness, but not to surfeit ourselves by an unrestrained gratification, which would be the quintessence of selfishness, nor encroach upon the rights

of others by any ungracious monopoly; and where he enables us to find our own happiness ten thousand times multiplied by being reflected from the condition and in the hearts of others.

Nothing, to my mind, can be more plain than that our proper duties arise out of the situation in which our Creator has placed us and the nature of the powers which have been given us. God having placed us upon the earth, here of course our duties lie. Our talents are to be employed in the services to which they are adapted; and duties which are rendered imperative by the sanction of absolute necessity, which must be performed or life itself could not be sustained, can scarcely be enforced by a higher obligation.

The first duty of man is to sustain life. But life cannot be sustained without food; food cannot be procured without labour, and

this labour must be applied to the earth; she is the nursing mother of the human race. The body requires protection,—protection from the elements, from excessive heat and excessive cold, from storms and sunshine. Protection demands habitations and clothing; but habitations and clothing are the products of human labour, labour concerned and occupied in the productions of the earth, in their cultivation and preparation. Without human labour, then, life on earth could not be sustained, and without labour applied to the earth and the products of the earth—for where else could it be directed or applied? Whatever, therefore, tends to disparage labour, to undervalue it, or to disturb or evade its obligation, is clearly in opposition to the constitution of nature, or, in other words, to the laws of God. Nor has any person a right to avoid this obligation. There is of course

much labour and toil other than that of the hands. Much toil of the mind, much racking of the inventive powers, has been exerted and endured that the productive powers of the earth might be put in full requisition and taxed to their utmost strength and increased to their utmost capacity, and that the wearing and exhausting severity of human toil may be alleviated or abridged. Labour, earthly labour, labour exclusively connected with this world, is a moral and religious duty, an imperative obligation, on which the very existence of mankind is dependent.

But it is not a bare subsistence that we are to seek. We are to do what we can to make our condition here convenient and agreeable; not merely convenient, but comfortable; not merely comfortable, but elegant; and not merely elegant, but delightful. Why should it not be so? The Creator has

made all the human senses, in their healthy and perfect condition, so many avenues to pleasure. There are odours to regale the smell, savours to feast the taste, melodies to delight the hearing, and innumerable beautiful visions, infinite in number and variety, on the earth and in the skies, and in every object which presents itself, to interest, to gratify and to enchant the sight. Now, should we be the better, would human virtue be promoted, by the extinction of these senses, or the removal of all these sources of pleasure? Does not the acquisition of them stimulate industry? Does not the enjoyment of them excite gratitude? Are they not loud and affecting testimonials of the Divine beneficence, which fill the heart with pious confidence and thanksgiving?

Is not the enjoyment of them within the bounds of a just moderation not merely a

privilege, but a duty? They may be abused. Excessive indulgence may defeat entirely their beneficent ends. The abuse of them, however, is not necessarily incidental to their possession. Because we prefer food which is delicious to the taste, to that which is offensive or nauseous, it is not inevitable that we should become Epicureans or gluttons. Elegance of dress does not necessarily engender pride of dress; and habitations that are comfortable and warm and commodious and elegant, and constructed with a just regard to the harmonious and beautiful proportions of architecture, which are themselves founded in nature, and adorned with all the elegancies of the most refined taste, may certainly be no less favourable to benevolent and pious affections, than a bleak, comfortless, dirty, decayed, weather-beaten habitation.

I do not deny that there are moral dan-

gers connected with all the circumstances of our external condition; but in either case there may be lessons and occasions to virtue, as there may be in either case inducements to complaint, repining, pride, selfishness and criminal indulgence. Would the Creator have endowed us with such various capacities for enjoyment, and every where throughout his creation have so multiplied the occasions and means of gratification and pleasure, unless he had intended that they should be used? To put these powers and sources of pleasure within our reach, and yet make it criminal for us to use them, would be a refinement in malignity, the very thought of which associated with the Divine Being seems impious. Let us not entertain the idea that God could ever desire to see his creatures miserable, or to see them make themselves miserable. It is far otherwise. He provides

for their happiness; and, in giving them the power, he calls upon them for the exertion of that power in making their situation as eligible and happy as they can innocently render it.

We have an animal nature to provide for, as well as a spiritual nature. What, indeed, would become of the spiritual, if we neglect the animal nature? The notion of totally separating the spiritual from the animal life, as long as the body and spirit retain their present connection, is absurd. It is in the nature of things impossible. The care of the body is often spoken of reproachfully, and stigmatized as carnal. The common business and pursuits of life are represented as degrading, and in a degree hostile to religious improvement. It is surprising how much is said on this subject without any just discrimination, and how easily men are imposed

on by that which has no foundation in experience, common sense or truth. What a man would be without a body, I cannot say—I cannot, with any satisfaction to my own mind, even conjecture. Experience affords us not the slightest hint; revelation gives no intimation under what form our existence shall be renewed. It is supposed that when man quits this body, he will no longer have occasion for those external senses through which here all his perceptions are received. But whatever may be the case hereafter, our present business is with man in the body. We know nothing of the mind, but in its union with the body. All the operations of the mind are inseparably connected with the body. The perceptions and ideas which fill the mind, all the sentiments and affections of the mind, are associated with the body, with the operations of the senses, of the brain,

of the nerves, of the heart. The health of the mind, its activity, its vigour, the exercise of any and of all its powers, are indissolubly united with and dependant upon the health of the body, the activity and acuteness of the senses. There may be various combinations of thought answering, indeed, to nothing in the external world; but there is no thought, no combination of thought, no feeling, no sentiment, which has not gathered its elements from the external world through the senses,—which has not its origin, its emblem or its prototype, in the world of sense.

It is the same with the highest and noblest sentiments of religion. Religious faith, hope, joy, fortitude, charity, are all in a greater or less measure dependent on the condition of the body, and sympathize strongly in its vigour or its infirmity. Diseased affections of the brain put out the light, or cloud and

pervert the exercise, of reason; convert faith into distrust, hope into despair, love into hatred, meekness into resentment; change the bosom which was a temple of purity into the residence of unclean spirits; convert a Christian into a fiend; extinguish the strongest sentiments of natural affection, and will sometimes make even a mother the murderer of her own offspring. Sickness often makes sad havoc and waste with the mind; takes away courage; disturbs belief; extinguishes hope; makes the hero, who was not afraid to stand up before the cannon's mouth, quail at the whistling of the wind; and transforms the philosopher into a mere child.

Such, every one must acknowledge, is the intimate connection, the affinity, the sympathy, the close, mutual, reciprocal dependence between the body and the mind, that we cannot separate them; we cannot approach

the one except through the medium of the other. I know I shall not be misinterpreted by the candid and intelligent when I say, that, in a philosophical and a practical sense, the care of the body is the care of the soul. To take care of the health of the body is the first step towards securing the health of the soul. To preserve the vigour and activity of the limbs, and the clearness and acuteness of the external senses, is the first step in preserving the vigour and activity of the mind and the clearness and acuteness of our internal perceptions,—our perceptions of truth, of duty, of moral fitness and moral beauty. Temperance in eating and drinking, and the strict government of the appetites, the commonest appetites of our nature, is the foundation, the necessary foundation-work, of internal purity. Every species of sensual and unnatural excess and indulgence is pre-

judicial to moral improvement. But, on the other hand, there may be excesses of abstinence, extremes of personal mortification, which are no less hindrances to our moral improvement, and in truth as great disqualifications for the proper performance of our duty.

The world is the scene of action and trial and discipline. The moral and religious character is to be formed amidst the trials and duties and struggles of active life. In the hot-bed of seclusion or the darkness of a cell, it may seem to exhibit a sudden and extraordinary, but it is an unnatural and liable to be a sickly and feeble growth. It needs the bracing of the open air, and the powerful influences of the sunshine and rain, to give it expansion, vigour and a fruitful maturity. Business, pleasure, wealth, poverty, are all trials and full of moral discipline. Men are

not at liberty to desert the post of duty assigned them; and the only true and safe preparation for Heaven consists in the proper discharge of the duties and labours of earth.

The support of life, the care of our health, the proper covering and adornment of the person, the improvement of our estate, the perfection of our particular art or trade, the honest accumulation of property, under certain limitations and for certain ends, the acquisition of knowledge, the proper use of wealth and of learning,—all these are necessary duties, proper to every man and to every Christian, duties of religious obligation, and much more important than any merely devotional services, which certainly are not the end, but only the means, of religion. They are as clearly duties of much higher merit, if the merit of a duty is to be estimated by the difficulty of its performance; since it is much

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more easy to say one's prayers than to pay one's debts, and to keep a fast than to forgive an injury or make restitution for a wrong.

Now, to retire from this world without performing its duties, is a crime; to think to be more holy by avoiding its concerns and pleasures, is to act against nature; and to live in it without doing any thing for the common benefit, and to lay ourselves down as a burden to be carried along on the wearied shoulders of others, is any thing but a life worthy of a man or of a Christian. It is grossly immoral.

II. But I shall be told that the object of this life is to prepare for a better. I hope so. I comfort my soul with the sublime doctrine of the endless progression of the human being in all that my purest affections pant after, in all to which the holiest beatings of my heart can aspire. But I know no prepa-

ration for a condition of being to follow this, so reasonable and fitting as the faithful, active and conscientious discharge of the duties of the state which precedes it.

When men tell me *specially* to prepare for Heaven, I want them to tell me what Heaven is, that I may know how to prepare for it. When I am counselled to get ready to meet my God, and not to rush thoughtlessly into his presence, I can only answer that I meet him daily, hourly, always, and that I can never be more and never less in his presence than I now am. If I am told that I must, with a view of preparing for death, give myself up to prayer, repent of my sins, and devote my mind to religious meditation,—I can only answer that I do not feel myself, even were I assured of half a century of longer life, at liberty to live one moment without repenting of my sins, and that prayers and

reflection can have no value but as they make me more active in the duties of life; and certainly, as my time grows shorter, I must not neglect the end for the sake of attending solely to the means by which that end may be brought about.

A beautiful young woman, with eyes uplifted to Heaven in devout transport, pressing a crucifix to her bosom and just about to receive absolution from her crest-shorn spiritual father,—or an old white-haired hermit, with a long grey beard, a sackcloth robe, a leathern girdle, kneeling before an altar in a dimly-lighted cell, crossing himself, repeating his ave-marias or counting his beads,—are charming objects for a sickly sentimentality to flutter and to weep over; but an honest labourer, with his foot upon his spade, trying faithfully to earn his wages, or to bring bread out of the earth for himself and his wife

and children and dependants,—or a kind and faithful mother, gathering her children round her knee, that she may satisfy their active and impatient curiosity, or instil into their tender hearts the lessons of wisdom,—or even the more humble example of a frugal and faithful housewife mending her husband and children's clothes, though it might be on a Sunday morning, if the poor laborious creature has not had time to do it before,—or the poverty-stricken child of misfortune, with no silver or gold to impart, giving night after night her kind and affectionate services at the bed-side of some poor sick neighbour as desolate as herself,—are to me far higher objects of reverence, and in my opinion much more of saints and much nearer to Heaven. Your purely spiritual people are in general the most useless people in the world, and would find it difficult to sustain their spirituality, were it not for the practical and the labo-

rious. In general, they are the mere rubbish of society, to whom if the world were left, it would soon come to an end. They wish to convert the earth into a great penitentiary. Their inconsistency in many cases is not a little amusing; for with the most sombre and terrific denunciations of the common harmless amusements of the world, you will hear them singing with the greatest fervour, and with appetites highly whetted for enjoyment, those hymns which describe Heaven as a feast, a magnificent supper, a royal and splendid banquet in a celestial palace, with its pavement of precious stones, lighted up with innumerable lamps, and where, dressed in white robes and wearing jewelled rings and crowns of surpassing brilliancy, they are to indulge through eternity in what would be very properly called on earth the most delicious sensualities.

We all know the history of Monkery, the

fanaticism of what is called the dark ages, of which we see not unfrequently strong traces in these light ages. Under pretence of leading more holy and religious lives, men and women retired from the world and shut themselves up in what were called religious houses, convents or monasteries, wholly separated from the common duties and business of life. Has a Christian a right to do this? Upon the great principle of loving his neighbour as himself, is he not imperatively bound to do all he can to serve the community and to be useful to his fellow-men? And can any man or woman who thus shuts himself or herself up in his own shell, do his duties to society? It is far otherwise; and with the exception of those cases where these people devoted themselves to the care of the sick or the education of the young, as they have sometimes done with eminent and disinterested

benevolence, they were the most useless and selfish beings to be found. If, now, uselessness or selfishness make any part of Christianity, it is a Christianity which never could have been learnt in the school of that Master whose life was a course of unremitted labour, and "who went about continually doing good." Others devoted themselves entirely to exercises of religious worship, to works of penance, to frequent and long fastings, and to various flagellations and severe mortifications of the body. Did this make them any better men? Was this performing their duty? If these voluntary sufferings made them more penitent for their sins and less disposed to repeat them, it might be so far useful; but when they regarded these voluntary sufferings as a commutation or atonement for their sins, it was an idle delusion. It was a mere deceptive substitute for those

right doings by which only they could repair the injury of their wrong doings; and, if a homely expression be allowed, one ounce of honest retribution was worth a thousand pounds of such repentance. If these voluntary abstinences and penances assisted them in subduing and curbing passions which had become excessive and depraved by indulgence, it was so far good; but if, beyond this aid to self-government, it reduced their strength, and occupied time which might be usefully employed, and took them away from the proper duties of life, and induced them to take a pride in their mortifications, it was a totally different matter from real, practical Christian virtue. Devotional services are means to a certain end. They are of no value but as they conduce to moral ends,—to make us more active and faithful in our duties, more patient, firm and contented under our

trials, and more useful and beneficent in our relations with others. If they fail of these purposes, they are often worse than useless.

III. I believe, with all the strength which I can give to my faith, in a future life. I look upon the disclosures which Jesus Christ has made of man's immortality, as the greatest boon which ever fell to man's lot,—as bread to the poor pilgrim famishing with hunger,—as a cup of nectar to his aching soul and his parched lips, when ready to faint by the way and to be for ever hidden under the sands of the desert.

But this is all I know. What this future life is to be, I cannot even conjecture. God has given me an existence here, which, under favourable circumstances, is all that I could desire, because it furnishes ample scope for the exertion of all the faculties with which

I am endowed, and for all the improvement of which I am capable. I do not as yet know who has reached the goal or found the end. I can surely trust Him to do even far better for me than he has done here. I know as much, and no more, of the state upon which I am about to enter, as the unborn child of the world into which, by the providence of God, he is to be ushered. I am content to be summoned whenever in his wisdom it may seem proper, and ask only that I may be found actively and faithfully employed in the duties of my station. It is not so much what I do, as how I do it. I may be found in a fit or an unfit frame in any place and in every place. I might be found at the table of the Lord, unforgiving to my enemies, and full of conceit of my own sanctity, and my heart swelling with spiritual pride—but this would be a very unfit preparation for Heaven; or I

might be summoned from a scene of the gayest and wildest festivity, entering with a benevolent sympathy into the innocent sports of those around me, and seeking to bear my part in and to increase them, and thanking God with the most hearty gratitude that he has made pleasure so cheap, so sympathetic and so diffusive. I should be quite content to be even so taken. In whose protection can I be more secure?—in whose wisdom may I more safely confide?—to whose love, infinite, unchangeable, and never knowing limit or restraint, can I more securely or hopefully confide all that I value, expect or desire?

IV. Having shewn what, in my opinion, is not religion, I shall now very briefly shew what I deem it to be. As a principle, it is a purpose, determination and resolution to do what God requires; in life and character, it

is that principle carried out into constant, universal and habitual action. It assumes, then, that to a Supreme Power, as sovereign over all, call Him by what name we please,—God, Father, Creator, Benefactor, Saviour,—belong the submission of all our powers, the consecration of all our affections and purposes, the devotion of all our faculties; to Him, in a word, is due our entire obedience; and this great and commanding principle will extend its influence to all we do, to the government of our hearts and minds, and to the regulation of our actions and the formation of our characters. This, and this only, constitutes a religious character; and under any and every form of faith, under any and every form of worship, in any country and every country, let this principle only rule over the mind, and control the actions, and form the character,—there is true religion. Without this, all pretensions to religion are vain,—flowers which

will not ripen into fruit, shadows without substance, painted clouds which the wind scatters at once into thin air. This is the only comprehensive and universal standard. Only ask your own heart and conscience, Is it my habitual, sovereign and inflexible desire and resolution to do what God requires, to shun what he forbids, to be what and all that he prescribes? Does this great principle rule supreme over my every word and action, over my manners and temper, over my purposes and desires? Happy, truly happy, infinitely happy, if to such a query the answer of your own heart and conscience is affirmative!

1. I add that this is an infallible, a practical and a universal test. It is an infallible test. Men may have faith without mistake, if any thing human can be above the liability of error, and yet violate every principle of belief which they avow. Faith, to such persons, is an empty dream. They may be scru-

pulous in the observance of religious rites, and display an enthusiastic and sublime devotion, and yet, like the royal Psalmist, outrage the obvious and solemn principles of right and duty, and plunge into the very depth of crime. Men may separate themselves from the world, give their days and nights to devotion, practise severe austerities, and yet indulge in enormous vices, and even think they shall find an extenuation or atonement for their crimes in additional austerities or extraordinary acts of devotion. But under the higher test which I have proposed, no evil can find shelter.

2. It is a practical test. What can be more simple? A man may be often puzzled as to what he shall believe. He may not always find it easy to determine what form of worship he should prefer, or to observe it when even the preliminary question is set-

tled. But under this test he can have no difficulty or doubt in deciding as to the reality of his religious character. What more can a parent demand of a child than that, from affection, from reverence, from gratitude, or from a sense of duty, it should be the rule of his life to obey the will of his father? Err he sometimes may: he may imperfectly understand that will; he may sometimes mistake it; but what more can reasonably be asked or desired of him, than that, seeking as well as he may to understand that will, his whole soul should be bent upon its performance?

3. It is a universal rule; and it should recommend to our confidence, to our fellowship, to our respect and to our affection, every man who, tried by this ordeal, is found true and faithful.

In looking abroad upon the world, wher-

ever we go, religion will in some form or other be found a principal and always present and active element in the human character and condition. But nothing in this matter is more striking than the diversified forms under which this great principle presents itself, the number of phases which it assumes, and the positiveness and dogmatism with which every man clings to his own notions and profession. All, certainly, have not equal claims to confidence. I have no doubt that Truth is one, simple and indivisible. But this diversity should read to us a lesson of humility and forbearance, and it inculcates a temper of universal charity. You and I believe that Christianity is the only true religion; may not the Jew with equal confidence claim for his religion, though wholly different from Christianity, a divine authority?

We are professors of Christianity; but who is to decide for us what Christianity is? The Christian world itself is rent into as many parties and divisions as ever prevailed under any form of religion. But "we all must agree," perhaps you will say, "in rejecting from our fellowship an infidel, an unbeliever, a Deist." Then, under such circumstances, *you* have no right to complain that more than nine-tenths of the Christian world unite in rejecting *you* as infidels, unbelievers and Deists.

I do not find that our Lord himself proposed any other test of discipleship than that of doing the will of God, or promised Heaven to other than those who kept the commandments. Why should we add to his requisitions? I cannot learn from any thing which I read in his life or teaching, that he designed to establish any sect or party whatever, other

than that of good and virtuous men.* The formation of a party was a work of later times; and his followers were not even so much as called Christians until more than thirty years after he had left the earth. The form of prayer which he taught his disciples at their own request, is one which may be heartily adopted by men of all religions, at all times, and in all places.

I do not place all religions upon a level. Believing, as I do most heartily, in the doctrines of the Gospel, or the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth,† as I understand them, whatever contradicts them, whatever is inconsistent with them, I look upon of necessity as erroneous or false. But it is not therefore necessary that I should assume the office of an infallible judge, and deal my condemnations

* See Note I., p. 79.

† See Note II., p. 88.

and anathemas upon those who, with desires and efforts as earnest to know the truth, have yet arrived at conclusions opposite to my own. I must yield to others those rights which I claim for myself from others.

V. We, who live under the light of the Gospel, hold a very high responsibleness, a responsibleness measured, as we believe, by much larger spiritual blessings and privileges than were ever before or otherwise vouchsafed to men. We feel that we are authorized to say, "Never man spake like this man." A divine wisdom flowed in his words; a celestial purity illuminated his character; a stern justice regulated his conduct; a benevolence, full, fervent and disinterested, poured out its fulness in all his actions.

But what constituted the true glory of his character? I answer, its moral features, its

moral aspect. And what constitute the end and aim of his religion? I answer, its moral tendency and requisitions. Christianity makes no difference in the great laws of God's moral government. What you hear about a scheme of salvation, with its complicated and cumbrous machinery, by which a fall was contrived, and then a consultation in Heaven for the recovery of the fallen, and then an atoning sacrifice upon earth to secure forgiveness, and then the arbitrary restoration of a few hundreds of men to God's favour, are mere theological and scholastic inventions, which you may safely leave to those whose taste inclines them to such speculations. I pity the man whose mind is narrowed down to such conceptions of the Universal Father. The great laws of man's moral nature are inflexible. As you sow, you must reap. If you find health in conformity to the great

principles of your physical constitution, so will you find moral health and happiness in conformity to the laws of your moral constitution. To be happy, you must be good; and virtue, moral virtue, is sure of its reward. Happiness is not a matter of arbitrary choice or arbitrary appointment, unless our whole nature should be changed. The harvest corresponds with the seed we sow; it is the natural fruit of our own planting. The sources of our misery or our happiness lie within ourselves, and make a part of our moral nature. Health is not an arbitrary gift, a matter of accident or caprice, but is the natural and necessary result of a well-ordered condition of the body, in which every part is in its place, and performs its proper function in perfect harmony with every other part and function. The use of medicine is not to give health; that it cannot do; but

its object is to remove obstructions, to heal injuries, to abate an unnatural heat or remove an unnatural coldness, or to quicken or abate or correct a diseased and unnatural action. When this is done, health comes of course, and follows the natural life and action of all the various parts and organs which compose this wonderful and complicated machine. Just so it is with human happiness. It springs of course out of the perfect order and condition of the moral machinery, out of well-regulated affections, passions and sentiments, all performing their proper part and duty, controlled by the just restraints of reason and conscience, and continually prompting to those useful and virtuous actions to which God designed they should lead.

If I am asked if there is any merit in moral virtue, I answer, the highest merit. Any other principle would at once abrogate the

principles of the Divine government, and extinguish the great sanctions of God's moral laws, and render human life a mere lottery, in which there would be many blanks and few prizes, and these prizes themselves assigned, not by the impartial or accidental turning of the wheel, but by the direct appointment and contrivance of the Being who is, above all others, just and impartial. Moral virtue, simple moral goodness, is therefore our being's end and aim. It is in religion all that is comparatively worth any thing, because without it every thing else is worth nothing. In the precepts of Jesus, in his teachings concerning human duty, in his sublime and attractive example, illustrating in so beautiful a manner all the truths which he taught, and confirming the precepts which he inculcated, and, above all, in his disclosure of an immortal existence and an endless progression for the

human soul in all that can conduce to its elevation, the expansion of its divine faculties, and the multiplication of its means of improvement and its sources of felicity,—what sublime motives, what powerful aids, what affecting inducements, has he presented to those so happy as to enjoy his teachings, to become virtuous, to avoid vice as we would a moral leprosy, and to press forward to still higher and higher attainments! May God assist our prayers and crown our efforts with triumph!

VI. For the first time in my life, and in all human probability for the last, my Christian friends, I have to-day given you my poor words. May the Divine Husbandman bring the increase! I have come here to-day with a heart struggling with many strong emotions. I have felt somewhat like the apostle

on the Mount of Transfiguration, that "it was good for me to be here;" to speak with those to whom the amiable and learned PRICE, and the wise and excellent PRIESTLEY, and the useful, sagacious and public-spirited ASPLAND,—names which I have been accustomed to venerate from my childhood, —have often spoken. But even more affecting associations, because more direct and personal, early after my arrival in this country brought me to this spot on a pilgrimage of mournful affection, and revive this day the most touching reminiscences. Under the spreading trees and the verdant sods of this peaceful repository of the dead, there sleep the ashes of a personal friend,* a friend of my early youth, a brother in the ministry, a

* The Rev. SAMUEL CARY, of Boston, U. S., buried here in 1815.

bright mind, a warm heart, a friend of truth, of virtue, of charity and of mankind,—a simple, faithful, manly preacher of what he believed the true gospel,—who, visiting this country that he might recover his wasted health and warm his own affections by an exchange of sympathies with the liberal and the wise on this side of the water, here—too soon, alas! for his friends, but not, we trust, too soon for Heaven—terminated his useful career.

"By strangers honoured and by strangers mourned,"

he found his last earthly resting-place in this churchyard.

It is not difficult for me to imagine this blessed and glorified company of the wise and good, beckoning to us from their high abodes, and by their wise counsels and their holy examples charging us to remember the

spirit that we are of; to acknowledge goodness wherever goodness is to be found; not to forget that Charity is far better than faith or hope; conscious of our own errors and imperfections, to look with unreserved pity and forbearance upon the errors and imperfections of others; and calling upon us to aspire to those regions of unmixed light and truth, where we shall look back upon our advances here as but the tottering steps of infancy, as but the first letters of the alphabet in the knowledge of God and of duty,—scarcely the rudiments of divine science,—the mere pluming of the feathers,—the mere lifting up of our dazzled eyes to the sun,—the mere shaking and spreading of our feeble wings for the endless flight of the soul in the open heavens of light and happiness and immortality!

NOTES.

Note I.

Christianity not Sectarian.

I do not understand it to have been the design of Jesus to form a party distinct from the rest of mankind. Had this been his design, he would have given his disciples some badge by which they should be characterized. But what is his language in reference to this point? "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another;" and, "Whosoever doeth the will of my Father in heaven, the same is my mother and sister and brother." Had he intended to form a party, he should have prescribed a creed or covenant. None whatever is given or enjoined. Every man, he says, that is not against us is on our part. To have formed a party, he should have prescribed some set service or ritual. Has he done this? The form of prayer given to his disciples is one which men of every sect or religion under heaven may use with propriety and without offence to their consciences. When called

upon to say what was the proper place for worship, his answer is, "Neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, shall men worship the Father; but God is a Spirit; and they that worship, must worship him with a true spirit, or in spirit and in truth."

It may be said that he has prescribed two rites for the observance of his followers. The rite of baptism, however, was not an original rite with him, but an established rite of his own national religion, practised whenever a Heathen or Gentile was converted from Heathenism to the religion of the Jews. He is supposed to have enjoined it upon his disciples, but certainly not as any badge of his religion. So, too, of the Lord's Supper. This was merely the last ceremonial at the Paschal Supper or Passover; and Jesus, on the night of his betrayal, having partaken of this solemn rite of his national religion with his disciples, seems incidentally to have recommended the occasional observance of this last portion of the ceremonies at the Paschal service to his disciples as a memorial of himself, being one of the last acts which he performed with them before his apprehension; and, by a strong metaphor, he compares the bread then broken, to his body which was to suffer, and the wine which was poured out, to his blood which would be spilt in the violent death to which he looked forward. But the injunction to observe this as a commemorative rite, which the disciples afterwards by their observance seem to have perpetuated, appears to have been on his part wholly

accidental and unpremeditated; and though its customary observance must be considered as a profession of reverence for his memory and character, yet most certainly it never could have been designed as a party-badge or sign of distinction. I cannot, in truth, put my finger upon a single act or word in the life and discourses of Jesus which would lead to the conclusion that he designed to establish a distinct and exclusive sect. It was natural that the first disciples, hunted and persecuted as they were in the beginning, and most deeply interested in his extraordinary history, should unite together in different communities wherever they happened to be found, for mutual comfort, support, protection and security, for social worship, for commemorating his death by the observance of the rite consecrated to his memory at his last interview with them, and for the grateful observance of the Lord's-day in memory of his resurrection. But there is not a word or an act in his whole history, as we have it, to warrant the belief that he designed to institute a distinct religious sect or community.

But if it were not the object of Jesus to form a particular sect, what was his object? Did he teach nothing which mankind did not know before? If he taught no form of worship, are we then to observe no form? If he inculcated no creed, are we then not required to believe any thing? How does Christianity, so called, differ from any other religion; and what is its value to the world? Such questions as these may

naturally arise. A full reply to each would occupy more space than can now be given to them. I shall touch upon them in a very brief manner.

Jesus presented himself first as a Reformer. Gross idolatry prevailed among the Pagans, and superstition and bigotry among the Jews. Questions of worship, of objects of worship, of forms of worship, of places of worship, agitated the minds of men, particularly among his own countrymen, and arrayed them into fierce and vindictive parties. His teachings bade them away with all this. He was for universal union and universal love. Jews and Samaritans, bond and free, Gentile and Jew, the poor, the rich, the Pharisee, the Sadducee, the Rabbi and the Publican, were all one with him, because they were all one with God, and by him acknowledged as equally his children.

Do you ask Jesus, Where shall you worship God?—the answer would be, Any where, every where. The true homage is the homage of the heart, and the obedience of the life, and the universal love of mankind. By what form of service shall you approach God? In the form congenial to your own sentiments and feelings, and most conducive to your own improvement. How shall you address him? As your Father in Heaven. How shall you serve him? By purity of life, and by doing all the good in your power. You are to love him with your whole heart, and your neighbour as yourself. But may not I be selfish and partial in my regards? May not I serve my party before

the rest of mankind, men of my own class, of my own politics, of my own church, of my own form of worship? You are to serve none to the injury or exclusion of others; and every man is your neighbour, be he Jew or Gentile, master or slave, Samaritan or Heathen, who is in distress or want, and to whom you can render a kindness. But shall not I call fire down from Heaven upon those who drive me from their city and will not receive my teaching? What a look of pity and surprise did such a question call out from Jesus, and what a bitter reproof did it draw down upon the disciples who proposed it! "Ye know not what spirit you are of." But did Jesus teach no doctrines which I must believe? He taught no new doctrine. He moved no questions which had not been long discussed. He taught the paternal character of God more emphatically than it had been before taught; but the Psalmist had long since declared, that as "a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." He taught the forgiveness of sins upon repentance and reformation, but upon no other terms. This Moses had centuries before proclaimed, when he declared "the Lord gracious and merciful, slow to anger and ready to forgive, abundant in mercy;" and the prophet Ezekiel had more fully confirmed this teaching in declaring, that "when the wicked man turned away from his wickedness and should do that which was lawful and right, he should save his soul." Nor was the doctrine of a future life original with

Jesus. A sect among the Jews was characterized by denying the popular belief of the resurrection of the dead, and proposed this very question for the determination of Jesus. But it must be admitted that Jesus taught the doctrine of a future life more confidently and explicitly than it had ever been taught before; and to those who acknowledge this great miracle, which it would seem impossible to separate from his history, he gave an incontrovertible proof of the doctrine in his own resurrection from the dead.

But did not Christ come to propose terms of salvation to men? If by salvation in this case we mean happiness, the happiness of a future life—and what other rational meaning we can attach to it I know not —I answer, he proposed no new terms of salvation, and has made in this respect no difference in the condition of mankind. The laws of man's moral nature are not abrogated or altered. A man's happiness and welfare must depend upon his character, his temper, his life,—upon what he is and what he does,—upon his strict and constant conformity to the conditions and laws of his moral being, and upon nothing else. This has always been so, and must remain so while man's moral nature remains as it is.

But what am I to believe? You are to believe what you see or can find reason or evidence to believe. It is not possible that the same faith can be required of all men,—of the ignorant as well as the enlightened, of the child as well as the philosopher. But am I not

accountable for my faith? Certainly, you are accountable, just in proportion as you have the means of ascertaining and judging of what is true in religion, and no further; and you are as accountable for the use of your understanding and your reason in availing yourself of all the means of faith and knowledge which are accessible to you, as for any other faculty or means of good which God affords you.

But what is the advantage of Christianity to the world? I answer, infinite—infinite. It is the greatest step that has ever been taken in the reformation of mankind from vice. If the principles of Christianity had their full influence, there would be no vice. It is the greatest step which has ever been taken in the moral improvement of mankind. The law of Christian ethics, or morals, is perfect. If it had its full influence, it must carry men on to the highest perfection of which their moral nature is susceptible. It would lead them into all moral goodness possible and attainable. It is one of the greatest movements that has ever been made in the cause of universal liberality. The tendency of Christian principles is to break down all exclusiveness and all sectarianism, and unite men as one brotherhood in the bonds of universal and unrestricted charity. It is one of the greatest movements that has ever been made in the cause of humanity, universal humanity; for it commands every man to regard every other man as his neighbour, and to do all that he can, when he can and as he can, to relieve

misery and suffering and promote universal happiness. It is the greatest boon which Heaven could grant for human consolation, because it reveals and confirms the doctrine of a future life, and leaves the heart no longer to the fears and anxieties of doubt, and to the unmixed anguish of despair. This is the value of Christianity. This is its scheme, if it must be called a scheme, for man's salvation or deliverance from error, bigotry, superstition and vice, and for his conversion to truth, charity, habitual piety and universal virtue. In a word, it is the greatest movement which Heaven in its mercy has made for human consolation, human virtue and human happiness. This is what gives it an immense and unutterable value. Could it but effect even half of what it is designed and adapted to effect, it would convert the world into Paradise.

These, then, are its objects; whatever serves these objects, whatever is connected with these objects, is connected with Christianity and serves Christianity.

When we pray, therefore, that God's kingdom may come, that his gospel may be extended, we pray for the moral elevation of the human race. We pray, not for the advancement of this or of that sect, for the establishment of this or that creed, for the prevalence of this or of that form; none of this; but we pray for the advancement of the cause of universal humanity and universal virtue. This was the great aim of Jesus; and whatever contributes to this, contributes to advance Christianity. Whatever promotes these objects, is,

properly speaking, the spread of the gospel. Every establishment and scheme for the improvement of the human mind, for the moral welfare of mankind,—every attempted change in the institutions of society having in view the bettering of the human condition, the prevention of war, the alleviation of suffering, the rescue of the oppressed, the extension of freedom,—civil, intellectual, moral and religious freedom,—is so much done for the spread of the gospel, and is working at the cause in which Jesus laboured and for which he died.

So, likewise, in regard to the profession of Christianity. If Christianity exist only where the name of Christ is acknowledged, its extension is limited indeed. But let us entertain no such contracted views. I admit that, in a technical sense, no Christianity exists but where the gospel is known and acknowledged. But in a virtual sense, in that sense in which Jesus himself, were he on earth, would have acknowledged its existence, Christianity has prevailed and still prevails in all ages and countries; sincere piety and real goodness constitute Christianity, let the name be what it will, let the place where and the form under which they exhibit themselves be what they may. "In every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him." Doubtless, there are many devout and excellent Christians, in the best sense of the term,—men whom Jesus, were he upon earth, would at once recognize as his brethren and take to his bosom,—who have never heard his name.

Every man is in truth a Christian who performs any Christian duty, who practises any Christian virtue —and just so far and no farther than he performs this duty and practises this virtue.

Note II.

I have been so much struck with some remarks in a recent letter from a friend, whose superior in intelligence and sound practical wisdom I do not know, that I subjoin them.

"My profession of belief, which I mention because you seem to enter into my views on these subjects, is—

"I believe *with* Jesus Christ. This is different, to my apprehension, from any of the forms hitherto assumed by Christianity. Who takes up the New Testament to see what Jesus Christ believed? The object is only to see what was believed concerning him."

These observations certainly suggest much matter for reflection.

C. Green, Printer, Hackney.

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